

Airbus pays 15.9 mn euros to close French corruption probe

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A French judge on Wednesday allowed European aerospace firm Airbus to pay 15.9 million euros (\$16.4 million) to avoid a corruption probe into

aircraft deals in Libya and Kazakhstan between 2006 and 2011.

Prosecutors from France's national financial crime unit (PNF), which reached the [deal](#) with Airbus earlier this month, said the fine was "fair and appropriate".

They had earlier highlighted the "repeated character of corrupt activities" by the plane giant, but said the firm had cooperated on the "dated" allegations.

Making the payment—the same amount paid to go-betweens during the suspect aircraft deals—allows Airbus to avoid acknowledging [criminal activity](#), meaning it can continue to bid for public contracts.

The company in January 2020 reached a plea bargain to pay a total of 3.6 billion euros (\$3.7 billion at current rates) in fines to Britain, France and the United States to settle corruption claims over several contracts involving middlemen.

But the company said earlier this month that the Libya and Kazakhstan probe had not been covered by that agreement "because of procedural issues".

The payments dated back to a "bygone era" at Airbus, PNF chief Jean-Francois Bohnert said.

In one case, investigators looking into suspected illegal financing by Libya of Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 campaign for the French presidency noted a 2006 sale of 12 Airbus planes to the regime of Moamer Kadhafi.

Three weeks after the deal was closed, a transfer of two million euros was made to a known middleman, Alexandre Djouhri, by a former Airbus executive who was charged last March.

Sarkozy, who has faced a string of legal inquiries since leaving office in 2012, has denied any illegal campaign financing from Libya.

The other corruption inquiry involves suspected kickbacks for several contracts between France and Kazakhstan in 2009 and 2010, while Sarkozy was president.

The deals included the purchase of two satellites from Airbus' former Astrium unit, where investigators discovered traces of an 8.8-million-euro payment to a Singapore account held by a Hong Kong-based offshore vehicle, Caspian Corp.

Caspian is linked to a Tunisian middleman, Lyes Ben Chedli, who was charged in July 2021 along with a former Airbus executive, Olivier Brun.

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